

Physical Activity

Physical activity provides important health and emotional benefits for adolescents. It lowers blood pressure, aids in weight management, and improves cardiorespiratory function (1). A physically active lifestyle may continue into adulthood, while less active adolescents are more likely to remain less active as adults. Among adolescents, low physical activity has been associated with other negative health behaviors (2).

■ In 1999 over two-thirds (70 percent) of all high school students participated in moderate to vigorous physical activity in the previous 7 days. Healthy People 2010 objectives highlight the importance of both vigorous and moderate physical activity among adolescents (3). Specifically, increasing the proportion of adolescents who engage in vigorous physical activity that promotes cardiorespiratory fitness is a critical adolescent objective and a Leading Health Indicator.

■ Physical activity generally declines during adolescence. Female and male students in grade 9 were more likely to have participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity than students in grades 10–12.

■ Adolescents' participation in physical activity differs by sex. Male students were substantially more likely than female students to have participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity.

■ Non-Hispanic white students were more likely than Hispanic or non-Hispanic black students to have participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity.

■ Participation in physical education (PE) classes assures a minimum level of physical activity and provides a forum to teach physical activity strategies and activities that can be continued into adulthood. In 1999 over one-half (56 percent) of all high school students were enrolled in PE class. Students in grade 9 were twice as likely to be enrolled in PE class as

students in grades 11 and 12 (4). However, only 29 percent of students participated in PE classes every day.

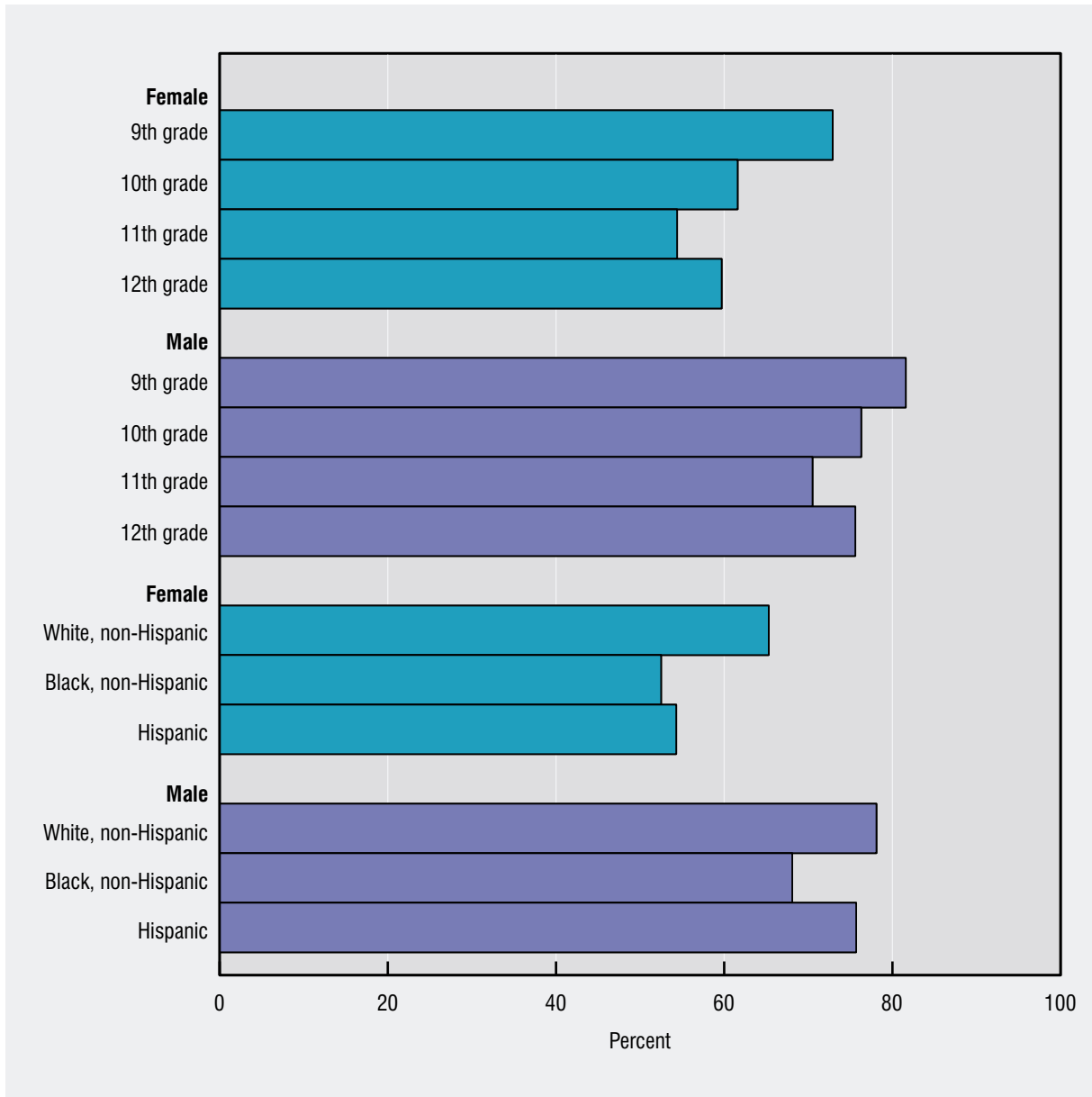
■ Regular physical activity and a healthy diet are both important for maintaining a healthy weight. Overweight and obesity are major contributors to many preventable causes of death. Adolescents who are overweight are at a greater risk of being overweight as adults (5). In 1988–94, approximately 11 percent of adolescents 12–17 years of age were overweight (*Health, United States, 2000*, table 69). The proportion of adolescents from poor households who were overweight was almost twice that of adolescents from middle-and high-income households.

■ The prevalence of overweight and obesity has been identified as a Leading Health Indicator in Healthy People 2010; a critical adolescent objective calls for a reduction in the proportion of adolescents who are overweight or obese (3).

References

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3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2010 (Conference Edition, in Two Volumes). Washington: January 2000.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Survey. 1999.
5. Troiano RP, Flegal KM, Kuczmarski RJ, Campbell SM, Johnson CL. Overweight prevalence and trends for children and adolescents: The National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys, 1963–1991. *Archives of Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 149. 1995.

Figure 30. Participation in moderate to vigorous physical activity among students in grades 9–12, by sex, grade level, race, and Hispanic origin: United States, 1999



NOTES: Moderate to vigorous physical activity is defined as activity which caused the person to sweat or breathe hard for at least 20 minutes on 3 or more of the previous 7 days or walking or biking for at least 30 minutes on 5 or more of the previous 7 days. See Technical Notes for survey methods. See Data Table for data points graphed.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).